

CHRIS AND LINDA HAINES' MISSION NEWS FROM UTILA

ISSUE 5 DEC 22

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:1, NIV)

Dear friends,

I do realise it's now actually 2023, and that this may well be the last document you receive with 2022 in the title, but this month's newsletter looks back at what Linda and I did during December with Christmas and New Year preparations. I returned from Belize as the month began, and was nearly not allowed back into the country by an overzealous official.

Having been home for one night I was then off again to La Ceiba on the mainland, while Linda stayed at home alone again. I arrived on Sunday morning, preached at the morning service there, then led an introductory session for their Local Preachers, two 'on trial' and three 'on note'. For non-Methodists, these are lay people who feel called by God to preach, so they receive a 'note to preach', learn to lead the rest of the worship for a while alongside a more experienced colleague, lead a 'trial service' and the move onto 'on trial' status as they continue their training, until they are 'accredited'. There are trainee preachers in other churches on the mainland, but a distinct lack of accredited preachers- Linda will be a great help as she is the most experienced Local Preacher in the whole Utila and North Coast Circuit. After having lunch with some of the preachers (delicious tripe soup) we went to the next nearest church, El Pino, by the foothills of the mountains, where a Local Preacher led the worship and I preached and led communion in Spanish for the first time (thanks to Google Translate). Then we watched the glow-worm light show, before going back to the hotel.

We put our Christmas tree up early this year to try to generate Christmassiness in the 25-30 degree heat, without much success. We brought a few decorations with us, including some birds which had migrated from our bird tree, and the theologically correct Magi, who seemed a little confused by the local stars. We dealt with paperwork (sorting out tax, expenses & residency fees) and watched the end of the World Cup, some old episodes of Sherlock with Jeremy Brett, and a few Christmas films, while struggling with a sporadic signal. Local food continues to delight- Linda discovered the delights of chayote squash, successfully transferred her recipe for puttanesca with sardines not anchovies, and capers- a church member in the shop that sells them thought it sounded disgusting but it is delicious and quick. I caught the fish trolley man and bought fresh mahi-mahi fillets (delicious cooked in coconut milk) and whole squirrelfish. Christmas dinner was at the home of a church member, with a number of church and family members present, and included both turkey and the more usual ham, as well as chayotes stuffed with spicy shrimps (especially delicious).

We are still currently without transport, which is restricting, though we hope to get another golf cart fairly soon. I tried to clear an area of the sea of rocks so we could go swimming in the garden, moving lots of stones, small sea urchins and glass fragments, as Linda removed loads of plastic bottles. Sadly a two-day winter storm has since moved them all back again, as well as creating a temporary moat around the missions house. We took a couple of days off after Christmas, with Linda reading books, me posting photos and us both watching films. Then I struggled to write my sermons for our end-of-year trip to the mainland, due to the loud discos front and back, eventually giving up with only two written. We then went over to La Ceiba, where we did some shopping, swam and Linda chilled out while I finished my sermons.

The Methodist school finished in November, but the school Board have still been busy advertising for new teachers, including a Head Teacher, and replacing three Board members who have also left. The teachers return mid-January and the children in February. The 11th grade (age 17) students also received their graduation certificates.

As you might imagine, church activities have been leading up to Christmas with associated events, plus other stuff. Rev Hanners and I divided up the home communions, normally on the first week of the month, after the first (Communion) Sunday. I haven't done much pastoral visiting, which is more challenging to organise here than in England, because nobody has addresses so I can only find people's houses accompanied by someone who knows where they live. Up to now Rev Hanners and a steward have visited with me.

I also helped with my first funeral here. I'd been told where the house was, but wasn't sure how to direct the taxi driver, until I said, "There's a funeral there." He dropped me outside the right house. I met the relatives and was invited to view the deceased man through a glass panel in the coffin. As I arrived I was told it had been delayed an hour as they were still digging the grave. Rev Hanners led the service at the home, I did some readings, then the coffin was loaded onto a pick-up truck which followed us to the cemetery. The coffin was lowered into the grave with another brief service. As he was German I sang "Stille Nacht", the only German hymn I knew, then church members sang about seven suitable hymns while family members took turns to fill the grave with soil, leaving a pile on top into which flowers were placed.

There were lots of church events over Christmas- Linda helped the ladies decorate the church, and attended the ladies' party. We were both invited to the Sunday School teachers' meal, and their programme, in which about eighty children of all ages participated. The Teen Tuesday party was a great blessing, they enjoyed playing 'pass the parcel' for the first time, telling the Christmas story with forfeits. Linda and I helped lead the Christmas choir, teaching them a few carols from Songs of Fellowship. Robbie the puppet helped reveal the true meaning of Christmas to children attending Breakfast with Santa, and Sally made her debut at the Sunday School Christmas afternoon all-age, attended by 64 people, and very nearly a dead scorpion I found amongst our props.

I led the Christmas Eve 'Candlelit Carol' service, though the candles were only lit for the final carol! On Christmas morning I joined the 5am(!) carol singing, when we were accosted by a drunk, the discos only having finished at 4. Our trip to the Cays had been cancelled, as thunderstorms were forecast, so we attended the service at Mizpah. After Christmas I led a Bible study on the Magi's gifts, before preparing four Watchnight and Covenant services for our trip to the mainland- Watchnights at 6 at El Pino and 10 at Zion La Ceiba, and Covenant services at 10:30 & 4, with Local Preachers' tuition in between- a busy end to the year!

Prayer requests for January:

Prayer for the varied work among children and teenagers

Strategic planning for new initiatives we are hoping to announce in the New Year

Wisdom and discernment for the School Board interviewing and appointing staff

God's guidance and protection for Linda and I as I'm at District Council in Belize for two weeks

Ongoing guidance for the shape of our ministry here during 2023

Prayers for communication and the trainee local preachers attempting their first assignment

May the God Who was made man, suffered and died for His love for us, and rose again in glory, bless and keep you all in His perfect will during 2023 and beyond, in Jesus' Name

Chris and Linda



Local preachers' training, La Ceiba



Pineapple farm near El Pino



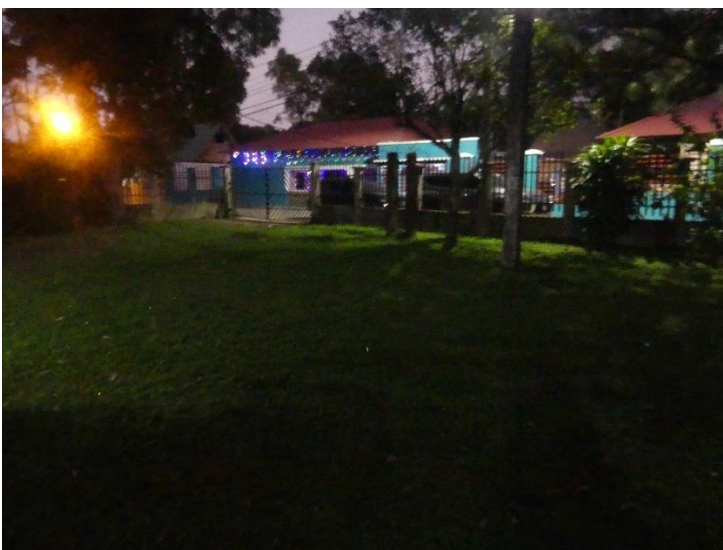
Emmanuel Methodist Church, El Pino



Inside church, El Pino



Leafcutter ants



Glow-worms in the grass



Our Christmas tree



Section of moat leading to our gate



Christmas dinner, including turkey and stuffed chayotes



Utilian Christmas pudding



Frogmen in our garden



Ladies' group party photo



Sunday School teachers' dinner



Linda helped lead the little 'Angels' at the Sunday School performance



Angels on the stage



Brown bark scorpion



Unwrapping 'pass the parcel'



Marshmallow-eating forfeit



Robbie at 'Breakfast with Santa'



Candlelit service finale